

REMARKS

Reconsideration is respectfully requested.

I. Status of the Claims

Claims 17 - 28 are presently pending, with claims 1 - 16 having been previously canceled. In this Response, Applicants cancel claims 18 and 28 without prejudice or disclaimer, and amend claims 17, 19 and 21 - 27. No new matter is introduced. Support for the amendments may be found, for example, in Applicants' specification at page 3, lines 8 - 15, page 14, line 14 through page 15, line 24 and page 16, line 11 through page 17, line 5,


II. Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §§ 102, 103

Claims 17 - 19, 24 and 25 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by International Patent Publication No. WO 99/01093 to Wierlacher ("Wierlacher"). Claims 20 - 23 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Wierlacher. Claims 26 - 28 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Wierlacher in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,131,736 to Farris et al. ("Farris"). As claims 18 and 28 are canceled without prejudice or disclaimer, the rejections as to claims 18 and 28 are moot. Applicants amend claims 17, 19 and 21 - 27, and respectfully traverse the rejections of claims 17 and 19 - 27 under 35 U.S.C. §§ 102, 103.

In amended independent claim 17, Applicants claim.

17. An interlabial pad having a substantially planar shape, a longitudinal axis and a lateral axis, comprising:

an absorbent body for absorbing body fluids;

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a surface side sheet and a rear surface side sheet enclosing said absorbent body;

a sheet portion lapped on the rear surface side sheet;

bonded sheet portions of the rear surface side sheet provided at the neighborhood of both longitudinal surrounding ends of the interlabial pad;

a pair of unbonded sheet portions located at the rear surface side of the interlabial pad on left and right side edges in the central area of the direction along the longitudinal axis of the interlabial pad;

a pair of fingertip insert openings at the rear surface side of the interlabial pad, the pair of fingertip insert openings being provided along the unbonded sheet portions and symmetrically with respect to the longitudinal axis for pinching the sheet portion; and

a folding guide element along the longitudinal axis provided to form a convex protruding area when the sheet portion is pinched via the pair of fingertip openings.

(Emphasis added).

Wierlacher discloses an interlabial pad that is folded along a longitudinal center line to be worn by a wearer (see, e.g., abstract of Wierlacher). With reference to FIG. 2 of Wierlacher, the disclosed interlabial pad includes an absorbent body 24, a surface side sheet 22 and a rear surface side sheet 23. A fingertip opening is created in a space 64 between the rear side surface 23 and holding means 58 (see, e.g., FIG. 5b of Wierlacher). At page 22, second paragraph, Wierlacher discloses that alternative embodiments of the interlabial pad may include more than one strip of material 58, and that the strips may be arranged as a series of loops allowing “the insertion of at least one user’s finger.”

In sharp contrast to Applicants’ claimed interlabial pad of amended independent claim 17, Wierlacher fails to teach or otherwise suggest that the pair of fingertip openings are formed by unbonded sheet portions on left and right side edges of the rear surface side sheet in a central area of

the direction along the longitudinal axis, where the pair of fingertip insert openings are thereby configured to form a convex protruding area when the sheet portion is pinched via the pair of fingertip openings.

For example, and as further illustrated by way of the non-limiting example illustrated by Applicants' FIG. 7, fingertip openings 2 as claimed in amended independent claim 17 are inwardly formed at the left and right lateral edges of the interlabial pad 1. The interlabial pad 1 may be pinched by inserting a user's fingers at each opening in a direction toward the longitudinal center line of the interlabial pad 1, thereby causing the sheet portion or body 2 to be folded in a vertical direction to create the convex protruding area 5.

Neither Wierlacher nor any of the other cited references discloses openings as configured in Applicants' amended independent claim 17 and as described above. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that amended independent claim 17 is neither anticipated nor made obvious by any of the cited references, and stands in condition for allowance.

As claims 19 - 27 each depend either directly or indirectly from allowable independent claim 17, Applicants submit that dependent claims 19 - 27 are also allowable for at least this reason. Therefore, Applicants respectfully request that the rejections of claims 17 and 19 - 27 under 35 U.S.C. §§ 102, 103 be withdrawn.

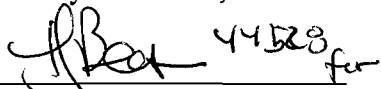
CONCLUSION

In view of the above, each of the presently pending claims in this application is believed to be in immediate condition for allowance. Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to pass this application to issue.

The Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number indicated below if the Examiner believes any issue can be resolved through either a Supplemental Response or an Examiner's Amendment.

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Respectfully submitted,

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